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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 003613

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H PLEASE PASS TO SENATOR SPECTER AND REPRESENTATIVE KENNEDY

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SUBJECT: CODEL SPECTER'S MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER OLMERT

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. CODEL Specter met with Prime Minister Olmert December 25. Their discussion focused on the possibility of peace negotiations with Syria; the National Intelligence Estimate and Iran's nuclear program; Egypt and the problem of smuggling into Gaza; dealing with Hamas in Gaza; and the negotiations with the Palestinians. On Syria, Olmert stressed that he had sent a clear message to Bashar Al-Asad and was still waiting for the Syrian response. Olmert criticized the NIE as "not helpful" to efforts to mobilize the international community against Iran's nuclear program. He said he would discuss his ideas on Iran with President Bush during the President's upcoming visit. Regarding Egypt, Olmert complained about "massive" smuggling of weapons through tunnels into Gaza. Olmert noted that Egypt was "not afraid" of the U.S. reaction. Olmert denied that Hamas had formally offered a truce in Gaza, stressing that Israel would not negotiate with Hamas as long as the latter did not recognize Israel. Olmert praised President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad as "genuine and honest" in their desire for peace. Regarding Palestinian complaints about ongoing settlement activity, Olmert said he had informed the cabinet that Israel is freezing construction in the West Bank and will not confiscate any new land, but he insisted that the freeze does not apply to the settlement blocs that Israel expects to retain. Olmert said he was "not pessimistic" about the negotiations with the Palestinians. He thought an agreement could be reached within a year, but it would not be implemented for some time. He expressed hope that Palestinian society was undergoing a positive change. Israel was prepared to move forward, but carefully and without exposing itself to danger. End Summary.

¶2. (U) CODEL Specter (Senator Arlen Specter (R, Pennsylvania), Representative Patrick Kennedy (D, Rhode Island, Senate staffer Christopher Bradish, and military physician Navy Captain Ronald Smith), accompanied by PolCouns, met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert December 25. Olmert was joined by his Chief of Staff Yoram Turbowicz, Foreign Policy Adviser Shalom Tourgeman, Spokesman Mark Regev, and incoming Israeli Consul General in Philadelphia Daniel Kutner.

Negotiating with Syria

¶3. (C) Responding to Olmert's question about Washington developments, Senator Specter commented that President Bush is becoming more engaged in the peace process. Specter noted that he sensed a shift in the Administration's opposition to engaging Syria. Olmert commented that it was difficult to move forward with Syria when Damascus ignored the world's demand that it cease its intervention in Lebanon. Syria continued to kill Lebanese members of parliament and even the

future chief of staff of the Lebanese army. Even President Sarkozy had lost patience with Syria, he noted. Specter agreed that Syria was difficult, but he thought there was a chance to move forward. He said he had met in Washington with the Syrian deputy foreign minister after the Annapolis Conference, and the Syrian had told him that Syria wanted to talk to Israel. Syria wanted the Golan Heights back, so Israel could use this as leverage for better Syrian behavior on Lebanon and support for Hizballah and Hamas.

¶4. (C) Olmert noted that he had said publicly that he was prepared in principle to negotiate with Syria, but it would be a long process. The deputy foreign minister might say nice things, but the Syrians had to begin to deliver. Specter asked who would move first, adding that Olmert had told him the same thing a year ago. Olmert responded that he had done a lot in the past year to reach out to Syria. Syria, however, had not responded to the new "attitude that we have clearly conveyed." So far, there had been no response. Noting his long history of contacts with the late Hafiz Al-Asad, Senator Specter said he would raise this with President Bashar Al-Asad when he visited Damascus. Bashar was not his father, but it still may be possible to deal with him. Olmert agreed that Bashar was not his father. He added that he had urged Secretary Rice to invite Syria to Annapolis. (Note: This part of the meeting was leaked in detail to the Israeli media the same evening by Olmert's office.)

Iran and the NIE

¶5. (C) Senator Specter asked whether the international community could deliver sanctions that would be sufficiently

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tough to stop Iran's nuclear program. Olmert responded that the NIE was "not helpful" in this regard. Israel was convinced that Iran was determined to get the bomb, but there was no smoking gun. Olmert said President Putin had told him about Putin's meeting with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, during which Putin asked why Iran was rushing to enrich uranium. If Iran's goal was to develop an alternative source of energy, why enrich uranium while Iran had no technical means to use the enriched uranium? Putin said that Khamenei responded that no one had ever asked him that question before, and he did not know the answer. Olmert said his answer was that Iran was enriching uranium to produce a bomb.

The U.S. intelligence agencies must have solid information about Iran stopping its weapons program in 2003, but they did not know for certain whether the program had been restarted. If Iran obtained enough enriched uranium, it would get a bomb easily. Olmert stressed that every means must be used to pressure Iran.

¶6. (C) Senator Specter recommended not to rely on the CIA, which he said had been "wrong too often." Putin, he said, had the best idea, which was for Russia to supply Iran with enriched uranium. The question was whether Iran could be stopped short of military means. Olmert said a concerted effort by the international community, including Russia and China, could work. He complained that the public thinks there are only two options, either war or acquiescence. Olmert said he plans to discuss ideas about third options with President Bush during the President's upcoming visit. Olmert expressed interest in Specter's plans to meet IAEA Secretary General El Baradei in Vienna. He urged Specter to

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talk to El Baradei about the NIE.

Egypt and Smuggling into Gaza

¶7. (C) Representative Kennedy noted an article in that morning's Israel press about Egypt allowing Hamas to smuggle

weapons into Gaza. He asked what the U.S. Congress could do to convince Egypt to change its approach. Olmert replied that there was "massive" smuggling of weapons, including some very dangerous anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles into Gaza. The Egyptians say they have uncovered 67 tunnels, but many are still functioning, and weapons, money and terrorists are passing through them into Gaza. Egypt also facilitated the crossing of hundreds of Hamas terrorists. Olmert said he had complained to Mubarak that Egypt was not doing enough, but the Egyptians were "not afraid of the U.S. reaction." Congress had frozen some of Egypt's military assistance, but the Administration would use its waiver. As long as there was a waiver, the Egyptians would not worry. Olmert added that he had told President Bush that Egypt should not have its cake and eat it too. Defense Minister Barak was going to Egypt the next day to meet Mubarak. Olmert said he hoped that visit would help.

18. (C) Turbowicz commented that Mubarak does not deny that Egypt has not stopped the smuggling, but he claims Egypt needs 750 more border guards to do the job. Increasing the number of border guards would be contrary to the peace treaty, however, and the GOI would need to bring the issue to the Knesset for approval. That was something they did not want to do. Olmert said Egypt was not using the forces it has effectively. Congress should convey that message to Egypt in a powerful manner.

Truce with Hamas?

19. (C) Senator Specter noted that it had taken the GOI several days to respond to reports that Hamas had offered a truce in Gaza. Olmert replied that Hamas had never offered anything. On the day that Israel killed twelve members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas was frightened. They had phoned an Israeli Arab journalist, but their message was not clear. The Israeli media had played this up, and after a few days Olmert had made clear that Israel would not negotiate with an organization that did not recognize Israel. In any case, a truce would be useful to Hamas, which would use it to resupply and reorganize. Specter asked whether Israel had dealt with Arafat before he changed the PLO Charter. Olmert said Arafat had only pretended to change the PLO Charter when President Clinton visited Gaza, but that was not the point. The point now was that President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad are "genuine and honest" about wanting to make peace. This was a dramatic difference from Arafat. Olmert added that there was also a big difference between Hamas now and the PLO in 1993. Hamas said openly that it would fight Israel forever due to religious reasons. Arafat had turned

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out not to be a worthy partner, but he had no ideological objection to peace.

Settlements and Negotiations

110. (C) Specter asked about the Palestinian complaints about ongoing settlement activity. Olmert said the Palestinians were using settlements as leverage in the negotiations. He added that he had made a statement to the cabinet that Israel was freezing construction in West Bank settlements and would not confiscate any more land. But the freeze did not apply to construction in the settlement blocs, which were mentioned in President Bush's letter of April 2004. Olmert said he would not stop construction plans that were already approved.

He stressed that he had told this to President Bush, to Secretary Rice, and to President Abbas. Abbas had simply

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asked him not to publicize such construction. The Jerusalem suburb of Maale Adumim will remain Israeli, for example. If the Palestinians do not ask about construction there, Israel will not announce it. But if they ask, Israel will have to

tell them. Olmert said Israel had promised to withdraw from ninety percent of the West Bank and not to take any unilateral steps. It remained to be seen if the negotiations would succeed, but Olmert said he was not pessimistic. In response to Specter's question whether an agreement could be reached in one year, Olmert said he thought they could reach an agreement but it would not be implemented for some time. Abbas and Fayyad were serious, but that may not be the case for all the Palestinian negotiators. Olmert added that the Israeli negotiating team was serious about reaching an agreement.

¶11. (C) Specter said he had visited Israel twenty-four times as a Senator and there was always tension. Israel responded to Arab ill will with checkpoints, which the Palestinians say prevent them from developing their economy. What prospect is there for breaking the cycle of violence? Olmert said he noticed a change in Palestinian society toward moderation. There was a new generation of Palestinian businessmen today who speak differently from their counterparts thirty years ago. President Abbas himself had been a terrorist thirty years ago. Israel would move forward, but it would do so carefully and without exposing the Israeli public to danger.

¶12. (U) CODEL Specter did not clear this report.

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